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Published in:
American Journal of Political Science

DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12437>

Publication date:
2019

Document version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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Citation for published version (APA):
Junk, W. M. (2019). When Diversity Works: The Effects of Coalition Composition on the Success of Lobbying Coalitions. *American Journal of Political Science*, 63(3), 660-674. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12437>

When Diversity Works: The Effects of Coalition Composition on the Success of Lobbying Coalitions



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Abstract: Lobbyists frequently join forces to influence policy, yet the success of active lobbying coalitions remains a blind spot in the literature. This article is the first to test how and when characteristics of active coalitions increase their lobbying success. Based on pluralist theory, one can expect diverse coalitions, uniting different societal interests, to signal broad support to policy makers. Yet, their responsiveness to this signal (i.e., signaling benefits) and contribution incentives within the coalition (i.e., cooperation costs) are likely to vary with issue salience. This theory is tested on a unique data set comprising 50 issues in five European countries. Results reveal a strong moderating effect of salience on the relationship between coalition diversity and success: On less salient issues, homogenous coalitions are more likely to succeed, whereas the effect reverses with higher salience, where diverse coalitions are more successful. These findings have implications for understanding political responsiveness and potential policy capture.

Replication Materials: The data and materials required to verify the computational reproducibility of the results, procedures and analyses in this article are available on the *American Journal of Political Science* Dataverse within the Harvard Dataverse Network, at: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/PGGBB4>.

The questions of whether, when, and how lobbyists can get policy outcomes to reflect their preferences have intrigued political scientists for many decades (Leech 2010; Schattschneider 1960; Truman 1958). One relative blind spot in this literature is, however, the success of lobbying coalitions, actively joining forces on specific issues. Lobbyists are not lone wolves. On the contrary, they usually work in packs (Mahoney and Baumgartner 2015, 214) and use coalition action as one of the most prominent lobbying strategies (Baumgartner et al. 2009, 180; Hojnacki et al. 2012, 389; Nelson and Yackee 2012; Nownes 2006). Although the advocacy literature has long attested that “lobbying is a collective enterprise” (Klüver 2013, 59) and explored factors explaining coalition formation or behavior within coalitions (Box-Steffensmeier and Christenson 2014; Gray and Lowery 1998; Heaney and Leifeld 2018; Hojnacki 1997; Holyoke 2008, 2009; Hula 1999; Mahoney 2007b; Van Dyke and McCammon 2010), the success of active lobbying coalitions in attaining their policy preferences is rarely put to an empirical test.

Instead, most studies of advocacy success treat single lobbyists as independent units of analysis. Although

some include information on the size or resources of lobbying “camps” or “sides” promoting the same policy position (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Klüver 2013; Mahoney and Baumgartner 2015), they typically overlook *active cooperation* between these actors. Exceptions are a few studies using network characteristics to explain selected measures of lobbying influence, which show that ties between groups affect perceived influence of groups in the network (Heaney 2014) or that well-connected groups are more likely to attain their preferences in the judicial venue (Box-Steffensmeier, Christenson, and Hitt 2013). In contrast, and quite surprisingly, other studies on issue-specific coalitions have found a negative relationship between coalition membership and the likelihood of lobbying success on the issue (Haider-Markel 2006; Mahoney and Baumgartner 2004). One potential reason for these findings is that aggregate effects might be misleading because benefits of coalition lobbying may “not hold across the board” (Mahoney and Baumgartner 2004, 11).

In this article, I probe the conditions for the success of lobbying coalitions by testing the effects of coalition composition and issue characteristics on lobbying success at the level of active coalitions on specific policy issues.

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American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 63, No. 3, July 2019, Pp. 660–674

© 2019 The Authors. *American Journal of Political Science* published by Wiley Periodicals, Inc. on behalf of Midwest Political Science Association DOI: 10.1111/ajps.12437

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The theory I propose expands on the signaling role of coalitions (Hojnacki 1997, 62; Mahoney 2007b, 368; Mahoney and Baumgartner 2004; Nelson and Yackee 2012), which constitutes a potential pathway to increased lobbying success: A coalition can indicate the overall strength and diversity of support for a policy proposal to policy makers, thus “signaling” political importance of the coalition members’ interest. However, this role is unlikely to hold equally for all coalitions and in all circumstances. First, the appeal of such a signal to policy makers should depend on the *composition of the coalition* (cf. Nelson and Yackee 2012, 340), especially on the societal and economic interests represented by it. A signal sent by a coalition of environmental organizations, for instance, will signal less broad support than a signal sent by a union of “strange bedfellows” (Beyers and De Bruycker 2018; Holyoke 2009, 363; Mahoney 2007b, 375; Phinney 2017) of environmental and business groups. Second, the theory is refined by adding that the effect of coalition diversity will be conditioned by the characteristics of the policy issue at stake because these affect expected responsiveness by policy makers to the signal, as well as contributions of coalition participants to the common effort. I argue that *advocacy salience* (cf. Beyers, Dür, and Wonka 2018) is a crucial conditioning factor in these regards. When an issue is salient in the lobbying community, policy makers will be more wary of political repercussions of policy outcomes that lack broad support. Furthermore, when *outside* pressures are high, because many advocates compete on an issue, there are higher incentives for members *inside* the diverse coalition to overcome cooperation problems and lobby together more efficiently.

The hypotheses are tested on a new and unique data set of lobbying on a diverse set of 50 issues in five European countries, namely, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (Rasmussen, Mäder, and Reher 2018). Information on active coalitions conducting joined campaigning or lobbying of policy makers was collected in an issue-specific survey completed by 478 active advocates. In order to separate out the hypothesized benefits of coalition diversity, the unit of analysis is an active coalition in the sample of selected issues, and 122 distinct coalitions were identified as jointly advocating policy demands on 37 issues.

The results support the hypothesis that advocacy salience moderates the benefits of coalition diversity. On salient issues, more diverse coalitions have significantly higher preference attainment than less diverse coalitions. On issues with low salience, however, coalition diversity is associated negatively with lobbying success, suggesting that internal cooperation costs outweigh the benefits of diversity. This pattern does not seem driven by variation

in coalition diversity between low- and high-salience issues, but the relationship between diversity and lobbying success reverses as salience increases. Importantly, the article adds to previous studies of advocacy success that have highlighted a similar conditioning effect of advocacy salience on the effect of public support (Rasmussen, Mäder, and Reher 2018) and the relative size of an actor’s lobbying camp (Klüver 2011). Both of these factors can be seen as forms of broad political support other than actively lobbying in a diverse lobbying coalition. Taken together, these findings are highly consequential for understanding decisions in democratic politics, which might primarily be responsive to signals of broad societal support when there are high levels of mobilization on an issue, but, perhaps worryingly, not on issues that attract less attention. In this way, the article speaks in a novel way to long-standing questions on the responsiveness of policy makers to different types of interests (Schattschneider 1960; Truman 1958). The findings are relevant for scholars of policy processes, interest representation, and lobbying success. Crucially, they provide evidence that policy makers reward diversity in mobilization, yet that differences between issues strongly affect the costs and benefits associated with uniting support from different types of societal groups.

Theory: The Benefits and Costs of Coalition Diversity

In essence, understanding the effects of (different types of) coalitions requires assessing how and when positive effects of cooperation exceed its costs. The literature on coalition formation depicts lobbying coalitions as costly arrangements, which groups avoid if they are resourceful enough on their own (Gray and Lowery 1998; Hojnacki 1997; Holyoke 2009; Hula 1999; Mahoney 2007b). Other than coordination and reputational costs associated with forming coalitions in the first place, lobbying together involves continuous coordination costs and collective action problems, such as free riding or competition for reputation and leadership (Heaney and Leifeld 2018; Holyoke 2008; Hula 1999; Olson 1965; Strolovitch 2014, 195). Arguably, such issues can hinder the choice and implementation of optimal strategies aimed at influencing policy outcomes as a coalition, and thus decrease preference attainment of the coalition and its members. These collective action costs might be one explanation for why some existing studies find a negative aggregate effect of coalition strategies on the lobbying success of individual lobbyists (Haider-Markel 2006; Mahoney and

Baumgartner 2004).¹ In contrast, Nelson and Yackee (2012) document that joining forces in lobbying can increase the likelihood of preference attainment—under certain conditions. Based on data on 19 regulations by seven United States federal agencies, they show that when the coalition is larger and has reached consensus on its preferred policy direction, the individual coalition participant is more likely to attain her preference compared to lobbying alone. The authors reason that such (larger, unanimous) coalitions reap benefits by meeting policy makers’ demands “for clear political signals regarding the overall strength of support or opposition to a policy proposal” (Nelson and Yackee 2012, 340). Other than size, however, decision makers can be expected to care about the types of interests represented in the coalition because the interpretation of the signal will vary depending on the set of actors sending it. From a signaling perspective, not all (equally large) coalitions should be born equal. A signal stemming from a coalition of three workers’ rights organizations may, for instance, be interpreted as less informationally valuable than a signal sent together by a trade union and a sectoral business organization because it means that different socioeconomic interests have found consensus. Along these lines, Mahoney (2007b, 368) argues that a coalition may ideally signal “support of a large and varied group of interests.” Crucially, this expectation is based on an implicit pluralist assumption that policy makers have incentives to maximize the types of interests supporting a policy outcome. In fact, it can be seen as one of the core questions of democratic politics whether policy makers are responsive to more diverse support when deciding on policy outcomes. The next sections revisit pluralist theory to formulate hypotheses about how and when diverse coalitions convey an appealing signal of support to policy makers, potentially resulting in benefits of cooperation that exceed the costs of cooperating within diverse coalitions.

A Pluralist Perspective on Coalition Signals

In pluralist theory, emphasis lies on the value and success of a “polyarchy” of actors (Dahl 1961). Most famously, Truman (1958, 514) developed a view on interest group multiplicity and diversity as a “balance wheel” in the American political system. He argued that the disturbance of any economic or social interest can lead to interest mobilization. According to Truman (1958, 511), all potential groups have “a minimum of influence in the

political process” because policy makers fearing electoral punishment take into account all groups whose interests might otherwise create a “disturbance.” In practice, the likelihood of actual future mobilization and its consequences will be unknown to policy makers, but we might expect them to gauge these risks based on signals from present lobbying activity. From this perspective, policy makers should respond favorably to diversity in the types of interests that support a policy outcome, as this should minimize the likelihood of powerful backlash in the form of cross-societal demonstrations, strikes, or campaigns to hold policy makers to account for particularistic decisions.

Existing studies have assessed interest group diversity from a population perspective (Boehmke 2002; Gray and Lowery 1993) and regarding activity on consultations (Rasmussen and Carroll 2014), as well as its importance for the behavior of coalition members (Heaney and Leifeld 2018) and for recruiting participants (Heaney and Rojas 2014). Moreover, Phinney (2017) has provided a rich qualitative analysis of the role of diverse coalitions in the context of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 in the United States. Yet, surprisingly, measures of diversity hardly feature in models of lobbying success, albeit diversity of support or opposition can be expected to be a relevant aspect informing policy decisions.

Applied to the level of coalition success, diverse coalitions can signal to policy makers that there is broad support for or opposition to a policy. An active coalition on an issue between similar organizations, say Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), conveys less broad support than a coalition between different group types, for instance, the WWF and a business association. The latter union between a public interest group and economic actors will presumably entail a broader support base that can carry or oppose a potential policy outcome. In the words of Mahoney (2007b, 375), diverse coalitions can ultimately send an electoral signal to policy makers “that a large majority of the electorate will likely support them, if they support this proposal,” so legislators can “vote for this without concern for negative political consequences.” Put differently by Phinney (2017, 3), diverse coalitions can supply different informational resources with higher credibility and, hence, “reduce legislators’ uncertainty regarding the consequences of policy change.” Based on these arguments, one can expect policy makers to be more likely to respond to signals from more diverse coalitions, so coalition diversity should have a beneficial effect on the coalition’s likelihood to attain its policy preference. Hypothesis 1 summarizes this first expectation of a general positive effect of coalition diversity on coalition success.

¹ Another potential explanation is endogeneity in that groups anticipating failure (alone) may be more likely to join forces.

H1: The more diverse a coalition in terms of substantive group types it unites, the more likely it is to attain its policy preference.

Costs and Benefits of Diversity and the Moderating Effect of Salience

One may object, however, that this argument ignores the cost term of lobbying as a diverse coalition. On the one hand, we may expect this to be higher than for homogeneous coalitions. Coalitions between “strange bedfellows” arguably bear higher internal cooperation costs, even after they have formed. Larger ideological distance between actors might complicate efficient strategy choice and implementation, for instance, due to potential conflicts with the member base (Holyoke 2009, 363). On the other hand, as Heaney and Leifeld (2018) show, diversity (in partisan affiliations) can also increase the contributions made to the common effort by coalition members, perhaps because the stakes are high once these reputationally risky coalitions have formed (Beyers and De Bruycker 2018). Looking at grassroots groups, Walker and Stepick (2014, 959) discuss that group diversity has the potential to both benefit the common effort because “heterogeneity helps organizations to resolve collective action dilemmas,” as well as to “thwart [...] the formation of collective identities and group solidarity, and therefore limit [...] the potential for effective organizing.” In order to understand the net effect of coalition diversity, it is crucial to inquire *when* this positive potential plays out and trumps coordination costs. Importantly, as I argue in this article, the characteristics of the policy issue can be expected to affect both the considerations of coalition participants as well as those of policy makers, thus impacting the sizes of costs and benefits of lobbying as a diverse coalition.

First, as implied by Heaney and Leifeld (2018), when the stakes are high, contribution incentives within the diverse coalition to facilitate cooperation toward the common effort should be higher. One can argue that the pressures associated with high issue salience can act as a uniting force within a diverse coalition, giving participants higher incentives to overcome internal cooperation problems between unlike partners or convince their member base of the necessity of reaching a common denominator. On salient issues, the costs of potential failure and reputational damage are higher for all coalition members, given external pressures such as higher visibility and competition with actors outside the coalition. Therefore, *cooperation costs* within the diverse coalition should be minimized on more salient issues because *contribution incentives* for its members can be expected to be higher.

Conversely, on low-salience issues, incentives to smooth cooperation between the diverse partners should be lower, so one can expect higher internal conflict and cooperation costs stemming from diversity within the coalition.

Second, one can argue that the responsiveness of policy makers to a diverse coalition signal is also unlikely to be the same across issues. Policy makers should fear negative political consequences of their decisions especially when there is already more attention and activity on an issue. On more salient issues, for which many interests have already mobilized, the risk and extent of negative backlash increases. In these cases, a coalition signal of diverse support from different societal interests should be especially appealing to policy makers seeking to insulate themselves from negative political consequences. Conversely, ignoring such a signal could be especially costly if many societal interests have already mobilized. On low-salience issues, in contrast, such incentives to respond to diverse coalition signals should be lower, as broader resistance or support would first need to mobilize before posing an actual threat. In sum, the *signaling benefits* of a diverse coalition should be higher on more salient issues because political *responsiveness to the signal* can be expected to be higher.

For these reasons, I expect a moderating effect of salience on the effect of coalition diversity. On low-salience issues, cooperation costs within diverse coalitions are expected to be higher, and benefits of signaling lower. As salience increases, incentives to optimize cooperation between the dissimilar partners should increase, as well as the benefits of signaling diversity to policy makers. Table 1 sketches these expectations to sum up how the costs and benefits from cooperation in diverse coalitions are expected to vary between low- and high-salience issues.

In fact, issue salience has long been central to studies of advocacy and has been shown to affect lobbying success in attaining preferences or winning governmental allies (Mahoney and Baumgartner 2015; Rasmussen, Mäder, and Reher 2018). However, existing findings are mixed regarding the direction of its effect (e.g., Bunea 2013; Mahoney 2007a; Rasmussen, Mäder, and Reher 2018). A potential reason for this is that the effect of salience may be differential, rather than equally affecting preference attainment of all lobbyists. Importantly, Rasmussen, Mäder, and Reher (2018) show that the number of advocates active on an issue amplifies the effect of public support on lobbying success: As the number of active interests increases, advocates benefit more from having public opinion on their side. This measure of activity in the lobbying community can be termed *advocacy salience* and seen as one of the different facets of salience

TABLE 1 Variation in Expected Effects of Diversity inside the Coalition

	Low Salience	High Salience
Costs of Diversity	↑ Cooperation Costs (– contribution incentives)	↓ Cooperation Costs (+ contribution incentives)
Benefits of Diversity	↓ Signaling Benefits (– responsiveness to signal)	↑ Signaling Benefits (+ responsiveness to signal)

(Beyers, Dür, and Wonka 2018). Somewhat similarly, Klüver (2011) has shown that advocacy salience during EU online consultation processes moderates the effect of the relative size of an actor's lobbying camp. Higher advocacy salience increases the likelihood of preference attainment for actors in the relatively larger lobbying camp on an issue, and it decreases predicted success of actors belonging to the smaller camp. These two studies show that advocacy salience moderates the effects of two factors that convey support or opposition for a policy position: public support and support by larger shares of the lobbying community (i.e., larger "camps"). These findings resonate with the theory formulated above that higher levels of interest mobilization on an issue increase incentives for political responsiveness to broad support signals. In the same manner, I expect coalition diversity to convey a signal of support, which policy makers will be especially responsive to when there is higher advocacy salience. In addition, I expect the external pressures induced by higher advocacy salience to affect the internal dynamics within the diverse coalition favorably. Hypothesis 2 is formulated based on this expected pattern of increasing benefits and decreasing costs of cooperating within diverse coalitions as advocacy salience increases.

H2: As advocacy salience increases, there is an increasingly positive effect of coalition diversity on preference attainment.

The next section outlines the research design employed to test Hypotheses 1 and 2.

Method: Capturing Active Lobbying Coalitions

One potential reason for the scarcity of quantitative research on coalition success is that data collection on a sufficiently large number of active coalitions is highly labor intensive. Passive "coalitions" in the form of lobbying camps favoring the same policy outcome

(Baumgartner et al. 2009; Klüver 2013; Mahoney and Baumgartner 2015) can be identified based on gathering the positions of all active actors on an issue. Even this is resource intensive on a larger set of policy issues, which is why some studies rely on simpler proxies for interest group preferences (Gilens and Page 2014). Capturing, in addition to these, *active cooperation* between actors requires collecting even more information, some of which is private, as coalitions do not always leave traces. To enable the present study, an online survey was sent to 1,410 active advocates on 50 policy issues as part of the GovLis Project on government responsiveness² (Rasmussen, Mäder, and Reher 2018; see also Flöthe and Rasmussen 2019; Junk and Rasmussen 2019; Rasmussen and Reher 2019; Rasmussen, Reher, and Toshkov 2019; Romeijn 2018). This survey collected information on issue-specific "signaling coalitions," meaning coalitions that jointly campaigned in public or concertedly approached policy makers.

Sampling of Issues and Active Advocates

The sample of issues included 10 issues per country in five European countries, namely, Denmark (DK), Sweden (SE), the Netherlands (NL), Germany (GE), and the United Kingdom (UK). These countries vary in size and (corporatist versus pluralist) interest group systems (Schmitter 1977), so findings will not be limited to one country context. The issues were selected quasi-randomly from the universe of issues on which public opinion polls were conducted between 2005 and 2010 in the respective country, and which indicate an opinion on desired future policy change. Surely, polling in public opinion surveys requires some minimum threshold regarding societal salience, yet issue selection from the polls was stratified in a way to vary media salience,³ policy type,⁴ and levels

²The project is led by Anne Rasmussen (principal investigator) and funded by the Danish Council for Independent Research and Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research. For more information about the project and its participants, see <http://govlis.eu/>.

³Media salience was measured based on keyword searches in one national newspaper per country.

of public support for policy change, to include variation on these dimensions. This sample has the advantage of selecting issues irrespective of legislative action or actual policy change, so it is fit to assess how coalitions promote desired policy change or prevent unwanted change (cf. Nelson and Yackee 2012) on issues that are on the public agenda. Issues in the sample include, for instance, increasing the tax on larger vehicles (UK), allowing more asylum seekers (NL), introducing a differentiated value-added tax (DK), paternity tests without the mother's consent (GE), and banning the construction of minarets (SE). A list of all sampled issues can be found in Appendix A in the supporting information (SI).

The sample of advocates active on these issues was gathered in three separate data-gathering efforts, which should jointly capture lobbying activity in different venues (Flöthe and Rasmussen 2019). First, media coverage on each issue was coded to identify advocates, meaning interest groups, firms, and experts, who made statements on the specific policy issue in the media venue. Two newspapers per country (center-left, center-right)⁵ were coded for an observation period of up to 4 years.⁶ Second, interviews with policy makers on 82% of the issues gathered additional actors active in inside lobbying during the observation period. Third, a desk research on formal consultation tools used by parliaments or governments was conducted to capture all actors participating in consultations or advisory boards on questions related to the sampled issues. These strategies identified 1,667 unique actors on an issue in the five countries. Gathering contact information was successful for 1,410 of these actors active on an issue, who made up the final sample for sending the survey to gather data on coalition lobbying on the sampled issues.

Data at the Coalition Level

In order to separate out the hypothesized effects of coalition diversity on the success of lobbying coalitions, the main unit of analysis is an *active coalition* in the sample of issues. This level of analysis also has the upside of avoiding some of the potential endogeneity problems

to do with the fact that advocates may enter a coalition depending on low expected success (when working alone). By focusing on active coalitions, rather than comparing preference attainment for single advocates to those that have entered coalitions, this problem is alleviated.

Out of the 1,410 advocates who received the online survey, 478 completed it. The surveys in the five countries have an overall completion rate of 33.9%,⁷ which ranks in the range of the 25–45% response rate that interest group surveys typically produce (Marchetti 2015). However, in terms of assessing the *coalition level*, the survey's coverage can be expected to be much higher because in order to capture an active coalition, only *one* of its members needs to report on it. The average coalition size reported by coalition members was 4.5 members, so probabilistically speaking, it is likely that at least one member reported on the coalition.⁸

To measure coalition behavior, a survey question addressed whether the advocate actively cooperated with others on the specific policy issue in the form of a formal coalition, which jointly campaigned or concertedly approached policy makers. The question was posed with a concrete explanation and examples of what types of cooperation are included (see SI Appendix C) in order to avoid ambiguity and increase comparability. The subsequent survey question asked the respondent to name the members of the formal coalition. Up to nine cooperation partners could be entered in free text boxes. To operationalize coalition composition, these entries were cleaned⁹ and classified in terms of the data required for the independent variables. In all, 36% of respondents reported to have been in a formal coalition on the issue and entered the composition of 153 coalitions. However, given that different actors can report on the same coalition, the data were recoded to avoid including the same coalition several times when different members reported on it.¹⁰ This resulted in identifying 130 distinct coalitions.

⁷Table B.1 in SI Appendix B compares response rates across countries.

⁸Although nonresponse biases cannot be ruled out, SI Table B.2 gives no indication of bias in relation to the dependent variable of preference attainment at the advocate level.

⁹Cleaning excluded entries on political parties or politicians and adjusted entries in which partners were entered in plural (e.g., "unions"). A conservative rule was applied that this means two partners, whose group type was coded.

¹⁰When two coalitions on an issue were the same in all or at least three named partners, this was included only once.

⁴The policy types are regulatory, distributive, and redistributive.

⁵Denmark: *Politiken* and *Jyllands-Posten*; Germany: *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*; Netherlands: *De Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad*; Sweden: *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*; United Kingdom: *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*.

⁶The observation period starts with the public opinion item and ends 4 years after, or when the surveyed policy change occurred before.

Dependent Variable: Lobbying Success as Preference Attainment

Lobbying success of the coalition is measured in the form of a binary variable noting whether the resulting policy at the end of the observation period is in line with the position on the issue reported by the survey respondent. The underlying assumption is that cohesive issue coalitions form between like-minded advocates pursuing the same position collectively, so the binary position (in favor of or against policy change) of the coalition member is the coalition position. When the respondent did not indicate a clear position (in favor of or against a policy) in the survey, but other data gathering had resulted in a clear position coding, this is included in the analysis. Still, in eight cases, no clear position in favor of or against policy change on the issue could be gathered, so the final sample is reduced to 122 coalitions given that preference attainment cannot be evaluated for unclear positions.

To construct the dependent variable of preference attainment, the position of the coalition (member) was related to the policy change that did or did not take place on the issue at the end of the observation period. The value 1 denotes preference attainment, meaning that the coalition supported policy change that was implemented, or opposed a change that did not take place, whereas 0 entails that the final policy outcome runs counter to the coalition's voiced preference. The policy outcomes on all issues were gathered in a desk research and cross-validated by the interviews that were conducted with policy makers. Importantly, this binary operationalization is enabled by a selection of issues from opinion polls that align in terms of binary outcomes and measures success in terms of a predefined policy result. It does not include smaller successes in the desired direction, for instance, side deals or exceptions that coalitions may secure, albeit an undesired policy passes. The results need to be interpreted in these terms of actual policy preference attainment.

Independent Variables: Coalition Diversity and Advocacy Salience

Two alternative operationalizations of coalition diversity are used. First, *Diversity (inverse HHI)* is the inverse of the Herfindahl–Hirschman Index (HHI), which was originally used as a measure of market concentration. Whereas the HHI measures homogeneity across different types of categories on a scale of up to 1, its inverse measures diversity, in this case coalition diversity, in terms of different substantial group types included in the coalition. The inverse index (1-HHI) ranges from 0 (most homogenous; i.e., only one group type in the coalition)

to 1 minus 1/number of different group types, which is the most diverse distribution (cf. Rasmussen and Carroll 2014, 453). To compute it, five different actor types were taken into account, namely, (1) Business Associations and Firms; (2) Trade Unions and Occupational Associations; (3) Hobby, Identity, and Religious Groups; (4) Public Interest Groups; and (5) Experts, Think Tanks, and Institutional Associations.¹¹ Based on this, the HHI is calculated by squaring the share of named coalition members in each category and then summing the squares. The most diverse coalition (with equal shares in all five actor types) would approach 0.8 ($1 - 1/5$). As an alternative operationalization, a categorical variable named *Bedfellows* is used. Its baseline (0) is a homogenous coalition including only one actor type. This is compared to *Strange Bedfellows* (1), meaning coalitions including Business Associations and Firms and at least one of the other four nonbusiness actor types. Finally, it distinguishes *Nonbusiness Bedfellows* (2), meaning coalitions between at least two of the four nonbusiness actor types (types 2 to 5 above). These two alternative operationalizations are only used in separate models, as they measure diversity in different but highly related ways. Whereas the index treats the five group types as equal and measures the degree of diversity between all of them, the *Bedfellows* operationalization places less weight on the degree of diversity, but taps into its type and a potential special status of business actors.

In order to test the hypothesis on a moderating effect of *Advocacy Salience*, salience in the lobbying community is measured by the average number of lobbying actors active on the issue in outside and inside lobbying venues according to all data-gathering efforts. The average number of active advocates per year in the observation period is calculated to account for differences in the length of the observation period. The measure is logged in the final analysis due to a skewed distribution. Existing studies have used similar activity-based operationalizations of salience in terms of the number of organizations expressing a preference on an issue (Bunea 2013), the number of EU online consultation submissions received (Klüver 2011), or the number of lobbying actors active on national policy issues (Rasmussen, Mäder, and Reher 2018). As Beyers, Dür, and Wonka (2018) argue, the broader concept of salience can also be applied to actors other than lobbyists, such as policy makers, the public, and the media. Yet, my theoretical argument about the risk of disturbance in the form of disfavored interests mobilizing against a policy

¹¹The codebook used to gather this information on actor types can be accessed at <http://govlis.eu/codebooks-and-data/>. An inter-coder reliability test (effective $n = 44$, two coders) resulted in a Krippendorff's alpha of .93 in distinguishing these five actor type categories.

applies most directly to advocacy salience, measured in terms of mobilization in the lobbying community.

Control Variables

Additionally, the following control variables are included at the level of coalitions. First, to attend to a potential business bias (cf. Schattschneider 1960) at the coalition level, and thereby an elitist alternative explanation to the proposed pluralist view, the share of business actors in the coalition is included. This may make coalition success more likely if politicians are more responsive to business interests than other interests (e.g., Bunea 2013). The variable *Share Business* is operationalized as the share of named coalition members that are classified as Business Associations and Firms and ranges from 0 (*no business members*) to 1 (*only business members*). Second, the literature has stressed the importance of resource pooling in coalitions (Hula 1999; Mahoney 2007b). Arguably, higher financial lobbying resources accumulated by the coalition should increase its scope for employing effective strategies and, thereby, its likelihood to succeed. Since our online survey only captured resources of the survey respondent, not by all coalition members, lobbying expenses reported in the European Union Transparency Register are used as a proxy for the lobbying budgets of all coalition members. These expenditures were gathered for each single named coalition member and then aggregated at the coalition level. The variable *Financial Resource Proxy* takes the log of the sum of all reported lobbying expenditures in order to moderate the effect of outliers. Third, to avoid a status quo bias affecting the analysis (Baumgartner et al. 2009), the binary control *Coalition Pro Change* includes whether the coalition favors policy change (1) or the status quo (0). Fourth, it can be expected to matter for preference attainment, and plausibly bedfellow choice, to what extent a coalition has public opinion on its side (Rasmussen, Mäder, and Reher 2018). Therefore, *Support of Public Opinion* measured as the share of the public (out of all respondents) favoring the same position as the coalition is included as a control. Fifth, the size of the coalition entered by the respondent is controlled for, as Nelson and Yackee (2012) suggest that larger coalitions have a positive effect on preference attainment. Given that decreasing returns to each additional partner might be expected, the log of the number of coalition partners (ranging from 2 to 10) is included as *Size*.¹² Moreover, the strength of the positional “camp” or “side” of an actor affects lobbying success (Klüver

2013; Mahoney and Baumgartner 2015), and it might affect considerations of choosing coalition partners (Hojnacki 1997). For this reason, the control *Camp Share* is included, operationalized as the total number of advocates on the issue with the same position as the coalition, divided by the total sum of lobbying actors on either side of the issue in the total sample of active advocates. Finally, the context in which the coalition is operating must be taken into account (Hojnacki 1997; Mahoney 2007b), so fixed effects for countries control for unobserved heterogeneity between countries.

SI Table D.1 summarizes the distribution of the independent variables and controls, and Table D.2 shows their correlation matrix. All correlations are well below typical thresholds for multicollinearity problems, except for the categorical operationalization of *Bedfellows*, which is highly correlated with the *Share of Business* actors in the coalition. This makes sense because the categorical measure is created based on distinguishing diverse coalitions that include business (*Strange Bedfellows*) or not (*Non-business Bedfellows*). For this reason, the *Business* control is only included in the models in which diversity is measured by the Diversity Index (inverse HHI), which only has a correlation of $r = .19$ with the *Share of Business*. Additional multicollinearity tests estimating the variance inflation factor (VIF) on linear regressions of Models 1 and 3 show low levels of variance inflation with values of $VIF < 2$ for the independent variables and $VIF < 4$ for the control variables.¹³

Analysis

This section presents the results of multilevel logistic regressions to test Hypotheses 1 and 2. The models include random intercepts for policy issues because one can expect that lobbying behavior and success are more alike within the same issue than across issues, so we cannot assume errors to be independent. The random intercepts for issues capture this variation without estimating the effect of other specific issue characteristics. Given the relatively low N of coalitions (122) and issues (37), this is preferable.

Table 2 shows a total of four models employed to test the two alternative operationalizations of coalition diversity in form of the *Diversity Index* (inverse HHI) in Models 1 and 2 and the categorical *Bedfellows* variable in Models 3 and 4.

Models 1 and 3 test Hypothesis 1 under these two operationalizations of diversity as the *inverted HHI* (Model 1) and by comparing *Strange Bedfellows* and

¹²Results are robust to using *Size* without the log transformation.

¹³Only for the country dummies, $2 > VIF < 4$ occurs.

TABLE 2 Multilevel Logistic Regressions of Coalition Preference Attainment

	Index Operationalization		Categorical Operationalization	
	Simple (1)	Moderated (2)	Simple (3)	Moderated (4)
Diversity (inv. HHI)	-1.77 (1.11)	-10.36** (3.31)		
Bedfellows (Baseline: Homogenous)				
Strange Bedfellows			-1.15 (0.69)	-6.52** (2.08)
Nonbusiness Bedfellows			-0.43 (0.65)	-4.53* (1.91)
Advocacy Salience	0.13 (0.25)	-0.66 (0.36)	0.17 (0.26)	-0.69 (0.38)
Diversity × Advocacy Salience		2.99** (1.03)		
Bedfellows × Advocacy Salience				
Strange Bedfellows × Advocacy Salience				1.70** (0.59)
Nonbusiness Bedfellows × Advocacy Salience				1.41* (0.64)
Share of Business	0.65 (0.90)	0.06 (0.92)		
Financial Resource Proxy(log)	0.02 (0.05)	0.05 (0.05)	0.03 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)
Coalition Pro Change	-0.96 (0.54)	-1.13* (0.55)	-1.11* (0.56)	-1.19* (0.55)
Support of Public Opinion	4.38** (1.66)	4.06* (1.59)	4.00* (1.64)	3.62* (1.59)
Size (log)	-0.24 (0.53)	-0.43 (0.53)	-0.19 (0.54)	-0.16 (0.53)
Camp Share	3.51* (1.63)	4.24** (1.59)	3.00 (1.65)	3.73* (1.61)
Country (Baseline: Germany)				
UK	2.00 (1.15)	2.63* (1.18)	2.09 (1.16)	2.76* (1.21)
Denmark	-0.16 (1.18)	1.05 (1.22)	0.09 (1.21)	1.40 (1.30)
Sweden	3.01* (1.31)	3.06* (1.25)	3.39* (1.36)	3.59** (1.30)
Netherlands	1.94 (1.03)	2.28* (1.03)	2.14* (1.07)	2.59* (1.04)
Constant	-4.66* (1.85)	-2.71 (1.91)	-4.49* (1.81)	-2.66 (1.85)
Policy Issue Intercept Variance	0.60 (0.77)	0.22 (0.58)	0.66 (0.80)	0.16 (0.60)
Number of Cases	122	122	122	122
Number of Issues	37	37	37	37
AIC	155	148	155	148
Chi ²	20	24*	21	27*

Note: Coefficients are shown with standard errors in parentheses.

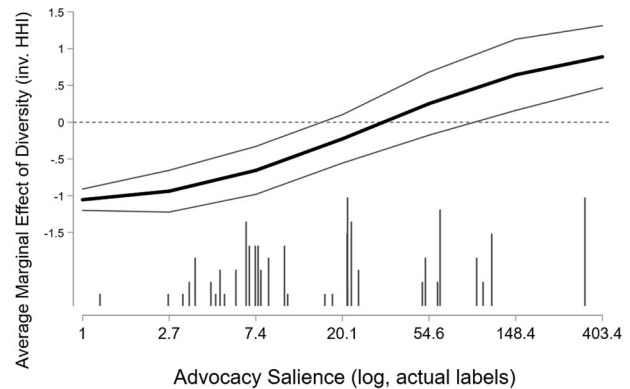
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Nonbusiness Bedfellows to the baseline of homogenous coalitions (Model 3). They show no significant effect of diversity on coalition success, when holding advocacy salience constant. So Hypothesis 1 on a general beneficial effect of diversity on lobbying success is not supported.

Models 2 and 4 add considerably to this initial analysis by revealing significant positive interaction effects between coalition diversity and advocacy salience (Model 2: $p = .004$; Model 4: $p = .004$ with *Strange Bedfellows*, and $p = .028$ with *Nonbusiness Bedfellows*). Importantly, this pattern is not just driven by a lack of variation in, or a different distribution of, coalition diversity on either low- or high-salience issues. When splitting the sample along the median observed log salience (which equals 21.1 active actors per year on average), we see that there is a slightly higher mean coalition diversity on issues with lower salience (0.32) compared to high salience (0.27), but the difference in means is not significantly different from 0, and the standard deviation in the two samples is alike (0.25).¹⁴ Furthermore, descriptive diagnostic plots of coalition success and diversity at these intervals of salience (see SI Figure D.1) and of success and salience at intervals of diversity (SI Figure D.2) show sufficient variation on both the dependent variable and independent variable across values of the moderator.¹⁵ The reversed slopes of the fitted lines based on the raw data give a very first indication of a potential conditional relationship that can be estimated based on sufficient variation in the data. Table 2 shows that the addition of these interaction effects to the models of coalition success increases model fit, as measured by the AIC and χ^2 both from Model 1 to 2 and from Model 3 to 4. The better-fitted models suggest that the effect of coalition diversity varies strongly across different levels of advocacy salience: Whereas the constituent terms on the *Diversity Index* (Model 2) and the two diverse *Bedfellow* categories (Model 4) are significantly negative ($p = .002$, and $p = .002$ and $p = .018$, respectively), the significant positive interaction terms show that coalition diversity is increasingly positively correlated with coalition success as salience increases.¹⁶

Marginal effect plots and predicted probabilities of coalition success at different levels of advocacy salience allow insights about how pronounced these relationships

FIGURE 1 Marginal Effects of Diversity with 95% CIs based on Model 2



Note: Thin bars below indicate the share of observations.

really are.¹⁷ Figure 1 shows in line with Table 2 that coalition diversity has a significant negative marginal effect at lower levels of salience, but as salience increases, the effect becomes significantly positive. For illustrative purposes, the log-transformed values in the figure were labeled with their actual values; at an average advocacy salience of roughly 99 active actors on an issue per year, this marginal effect turns significantly positive. At this level of salience, a homogenous coalition has a predicted probability to succeed of 50%, whereas a coalition with the mean observed diversity (inv HHI = 0.29, equaling, for instance, five business actors joining forces with one other group type) is predicted to have a 67% probability of success. A coalition with maximum observed diversity (inv HHI = 0.75, equaling a four-member coalition composed of four different actor types) has a predicted probability to succeed of 86%. Conversely, the marginal effect of diversity is significantly negative below an average advocacy salience of roughly 16 active advocates on the issue per year. At this level of salience, a homogenous coalition has a predicted probability to succeed of 70%, whereas a coalition with mean observed diversity is predicted at 61%, and the most diverse observed coalition has a predicted probability to succeed of only 45%. Table 3 summarizes the different predicted probabilities at these two levels of advocacy salience calculated based on Model 2. It illustrates that these align as theorized based on higher political responsiveness and higher incentives to overcome internal cooperation costs on more salient, compared to less salient, issues.

In sum, the relationship between coalition diversity and coalition success varies significantly at different levels

¹⁴See SI Table D.3. Also see SI Table D.4 comparing mean coalition size (no significant difference).

¹⁵Also see SI Figure D.3, distinguishing the categories of *Bedfellows*.

¹⁶Robustness in multilevel linear models is checked in SI Appendix E. All interaction effects remain positive and equally significant ($p = .004$ in Model E.2; $p = .003$ and $p = .023$ in Model E.4).

¹⁷In the calculations, other variables are held constant at observed values in the dataset.

FIGURE 2 Effects of Diverse Bedfellows (Compared to Homogenous Coalitions) with 95% CIs based on Model 4

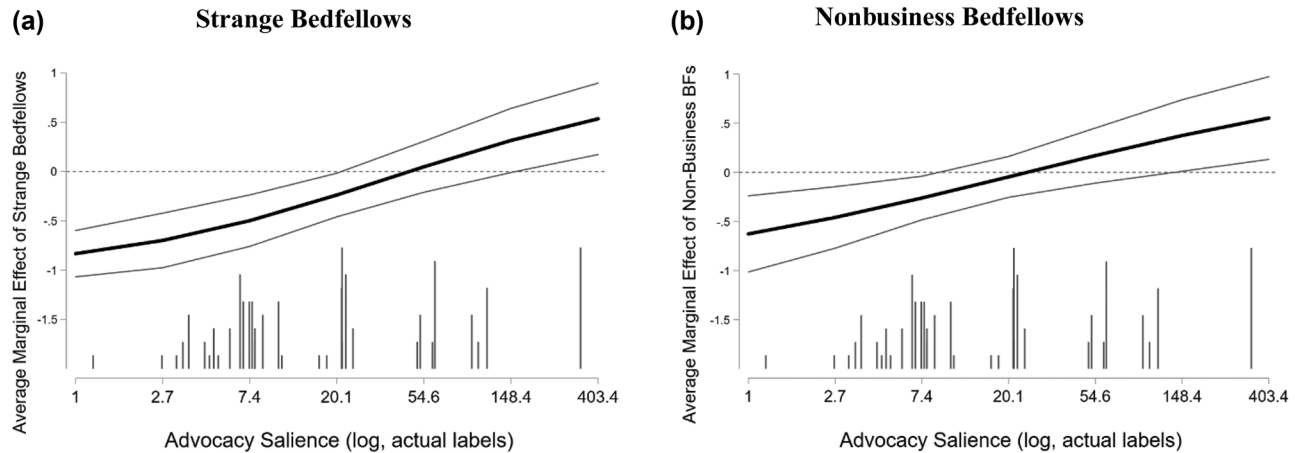


TABLE 3 Predicted Probabilities of Coalition Success in Percent

	Lower Salience (16 Advocates/ Year)	Higher Salience (99 Advocates/ Year)
Min. Diversity (0)	70	50
Mean Diversity (0.29)	61	67
Max. Diversity (0.75)	45	86

of advocacy salience. Coalition diversity is associated with significantly higher coalition success only at high levels of advocacy salience. These findings support Hypothesis 2 and are consistent with the theory formulated on differential costs and benefits of diverse coalitions depending on advocacy salience.

The alternative operationalization of diversity as a categorical variable in Model 4 provides further support. Figure 2 shows the same substantive findings as Figure 1. The panels compare the two kinds of diverse coalitions of *Strange Bedfellows* and *Nonbusiness Bedfellows* to the baseline of a homogenous coalition. Both plots show a significant negative effect at lower levels of salience and a significant positive effect at high levels of salience for the two types of diverse coalitions compared to homogenous ones.

The effects turn significantly positive at an advocacy salience of roughly 164 active advocates on average per year for *Strange Bedfellows* and slightly earlier, at roughly 148 advocates, for *Nonbusiness Bedfellows*. Overall, the

very similar curves suggest that there is no major difference between diverse coalitions that do or do not include business actors. Based on these results, there is no evidence that there is a business bias at the level of advocacy coalitions, with higher responsiveness to coalitions that include business actors.

The control variables give no such evidence either. Neither the *Share of Business* actors in the coalition nor the pooled financial resources reveal a significant effect in any of the models. However, a number of other control variables have significant effects in the typically expected directions. In line with existing research at the level of individual advocates (cf. Baumgartner et al. 2009), the models show that it is hard for coalitions to change the status quo ($p < .05$ in three models). Investigating further, whether and when diverse coalitions have advantages when trying to keep or change the cemented status quo could, in fact, be a fruitful avenue for future research.¹⁸ In any case, Table 2 also supports findings by Rasmussen, Mäder, and Reher (2018) at this level of analysis by showing that coalitions enjoying higher support of public opinion for their position have a significantly higher

¹⁸There is no evidence in the dataset that diverse coalitions, in general, find it easier to change the status quo than less diverse coalitions (see SI: Table G.1). The formulated theory could, however, also be extended to take into account that the benefits and costs of diversity at different levels of salience may differ for coalitions that favor the status quo, as opposed to policy change. In the present dataset, there is a higher number of coalitions advocating for policy change (70) than the status quo (52), but mean diversity and mean salience do not vary significantly between these subsamples (SI: Table G.2). Unfortunately, these split samples are too small to allow testing whether the interaction between diversity and salience holds equally in both subsamples. The article's conclusions are therefore limited to the pooled sample.

likelihood to succeed ($p < .05$ or $p < .01$ in all models). Similarly, having a larger advocacy camp (cf. Klüver 2013; Mahoney and Baumgartner 2015), among which the coalition has mobilized, has a significant positive effect ($p < .05$ or $p < .01$ in three of the models). The size of the coalition has no significant effect on coalition preference attainment, supporting Phinney's (2017) qualitative findings suggesting that the composition of the coalition is more important than the number of members. Finally, there seem to be country differences, with significantly higher coalition preference attainment in the UK ($p < .05$ in two models), Sweden ($p < .05$), and the Netherlands ($p < .05$ in three models), compared to Germany.

Robustness at the Actor Level

Although the analysis was conducted at the level of coalitions, the theory has observable implications for individual advocates and the effects of their coalition strategies. Previous studies, which found an aggregate negative effect of coalition membership on individual lobbying success (Haider-Markel 2006; Mahoney and Baumgartner 2004), might be driven by certain types of coalitions and/or issues. Based on the theory formulated here, we would expect that as the level of advocacy salience increases, the benefit for an individual lobbyist who cooperates in a coalition with unlike bedfellows should increase and be more likely to exceed the success of working alone. SI Table F.1 tests this expectation based on a categorical variable distinguishing homogenous coalitions from the differently composed diverse bedfellows, compared to the baseline of lobbying alone (SI Appendix F). The results of multilevel logistic regressions run at the level of individual advocates ($N = 418$) show that there is a significant positive interaction effect ($p = .039$ and $p = .036$ in Models F2 and F3) between advocacy salience and cooperation in strange bedfellow coalitions, compared to the baseline of no cooperation in a coalition (also see SI Figure F.1). Moreover, there are significant differences between the marginal effects of homogenous and strange bedfellow coalitions, and the directions of predicted marginal effects for these two types of cooperation reverse as salience increases (SI Figure F.2). For individual advocates, this means that the choice of whether to lobby in a flock or alone in order to maximize lobbying success is a highly context-dependent trade-off. It should not only depend on the actor's own characteristics and the issue at stake (Hojnacki 1997; Mahoney 2007b; Mahoney and Baumgartner 2004), but also on the interplay of the issue context with the specific coalition that is formed.

Conclusion: The Flipsides of Diverse Support

Based on a sample of 122 coalitions active on 37 policy issues in five countries, this article has provided the first analysis of lobbying success at the level of lobbying coalitions actively joining forces on specific policy issues. The results show that diversity in the types of interests united in a coalition for a common cause is no panacea, but that it is highly context dependent whether diverse coalitions attract higher costs or benefits compared to homogenous coalitions when lobbying together to influence policy outcomes. Put in the words of Schattschneider (1960, 20), the "outcome of the political game depends on the scale on which it is played": Coalition diversity becomes pivotal when the scope is higher in that more advocates are in the game.

Whereas one might initially expect that diverse coalitions signaling broad support for their position to policy makers should generally be more likely to attain their preferences than homogenous coalitions, the analysis revealed that this only holds as advocacy salience of an issue increases. It was theorized that both the contribution incentives for coalition members within the diverse coalition, as well as the incentives for policy makers to respond to signals of broad support, are lower when external pressures in the form of mobilized interests are low, but they increase as an issue becomes increasingly salient in the lobbying community. The empirical results lend support to this theory, showing that average advocacy salience has a strong moderating effect on the relationship between coalition diversity and success. At low levels of advocacy salience, homogenous coalitions are more likely to succeed in attaining their preferences, whereas the effect is reversed on highly salient issues, for which more diverse coalitions are significantly more likely to get policy outcomes in line with their goals. Notably, this pattern does not seem to be driven by unequal mobilization of diverse and homogenous coalitions, and the raw data display sufficient variation to assess the conditional relationship. This was estimated as a linear interaction based on the formulated theory of increasing benefits and decreasing costs of diversity as salience increases. By analyzing the sample of active coalitions, the research design avoided some common endogeneity problems to do with coalition formation that might affect analyses of the effect of coalition action at the level of individual lobbyists. Even though the sample of active coalitions is relatively small, because collecting data on a large number of issue-specific coalitions is highly labor intensive, the sample plausibly captures the universe of active coalitions

on issues on the public agenda in Western European countries.

The analysis at the coalition level helped clarify how positive effects of coalition signals depend on the coalition's composition and are moderated by advocacy salience. This can also explain why it has been so hard to trace a general beneficial effect of coalition lobbying (Haider-Markel 2006; Mahoney and Baumgartner 2004). Additionally, the results on coalition diversity speak to larger questions regarding the political responsiveness to different types of interests (Schattschneider 1960; Truman 1958). There is no evidence in the analyses that coalitions with higher shares of business actors have higher preference attainment across issues, or that diverse coalitions including business actors ("strange bedfellows") have advantages over nonbusiness bedfellows. Instead, the results suggest that homogenous coalitions (irrespective of group type) find it easier to capture policy outcomes on low-salience issues. Especially if political responsiveness to support signals varies more generally across issues in this way (cf. Klüver 2011; Rasmussen, Mäder, and Reher 2018), this is a problematic pattern for democracy, as it points to a higher likelihood of policy capture when the external pressure of high existing advocacy salience is lacking. Given there is little lobbying activity on a vast share of issues, whereas advocates bandwagon on some selected issues (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Halpin 2011), this risk can be expected to affect a large share of issues. Conversely, diverse support signals would only have beneficial effects on comparatively fewer salient issues in the advocate community, which are not necessarily the ones affecting the largest groups of citizens or constituents (Olson 1965).

One might ask, however: (Why) would groups not anticipate this and only form diverse coalitions on salient issues? The variation in the data, where diverse coalitions occur both on low- and high-salience issues, suggests this is not the case.¹⁹ This might imply that the choice of coalition partners also fulfills roles other than directly maximizing (expected) coalition success. Other considerations could, for instance, relate to interpersonal relations between staffers, or organizational path dependencies based on previous cooperation. Alternatively, it might suggest that the development of issues in a lobbying campaign is actually difficult to anticipate. A perspective not assessed in the article is the temporal dimension of coalition formation and salience. Diverse coalitions may be formed while an issue is low in salience, *with the intention to increase salience over time*. Such a strategy would pay off to the extent to which issue salience then actually in-

creases, but it would be costly on issues that fail to attract wider discussions and credible pressures of disturbance and electoral consequences. Unfortunately, the present data set is not suited to assess such development over time, but future research should consider these temporal dynamics between salience and coalition lobbying.

Finally, the strong moderating effect of salience also has other methodological implications regarding issue selection in studies of lobbying and public policy. It might not always be beneficial to study both salient and nonsalient issues together. Although we often strive to select samples from the universe of all issues, it may be favorable to study the smaller subset of highly salient issues more closely, if (coalition) lobbying success plays by different rules on them. Moreover, future research should continue collecting data on active lobbying coalitions acting concertedly to affect policy outcomes. It may, in fact, constitute a potentially problematic bias in the research field that it focuses primarily on single organizations as the main unit of analysis, and assumes these units to be independent. In reality, individual lobbyists compete with both loosely connected and highly cohesive sets of cooperating actors. Some of these coalitions might actually be better understood when conceptualized as single units, where different "organs" perform functionally distinguished tasks, but success is conditioned by how (and when) these come together. This article has contributed to such a research agenda by analyzing the signaling role of diverse coalitions on specific policy issues.

Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to the whole GovLis Team, including Anne Rasmussen, Linda Flöthe, Jeroen Romeijn, Lars Mäder, and Stefanie Reher, for their invaluable guidance and advice, as well as their substantial role and cooperation in the data-gathering processes. I also received excellent comments from Evelien Willems, Ruud Wouters, and the other participants at the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) Joint Session in 2017 in Nicosia. Moreover, I would like to thank all my great colleagues at the University of Copenhagen and beyond, who took time to comment on versions of this work, including Anders Woller Nielsen, Frederik Georg Hjorth, Helene Helboe Pedersen, Benjamin Carl Krag Egerod, Adriana Bunea, Jacob Gerner Hariri, Livia Rohrbach, Christoffer Pfeiffer Cappelen, Kasper Møller Hansen, Christine Mahoney, Beth Leech, and Peter Thisted Dinesen. I am also very grateful to the Editors and the anonymous reviewers at AJPS for their feedback and support in improving the article. Finally, I was lucky to get to work with a number

¹⁹See SI: Table D.3 and Figure D.1.

of excellent research and student assistants, especially Ida Edvinsson, Mikkel Wolfsberg, Paige Collings, and Christian Sattler. My research benefited from financial support from Sapere Aude Grant 0602-02642B from the Danish Council for Independent Research and VIDI Grant 452-12-008 from the Dutch NWO, both awarded to Anne Rasmussen in context of the GovLis Project (When Does Government Listen to the Public?).

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

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